THE SOUTH

focus

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The Changing South

The myth of the Old South dies hard. Ask the man in the street what the term American South means to him, and you are likely to be regaled with magnolias, mint juleps, banjos, bales of cotton, lynchings, and the K.K.K. Turn to a well-read citizen and the response may be "The nation's economic problem number one." Actually, the popular legend and the easy epithet, whatever their past validity, have kept most of us unaware of a profound metamorphosis in Southern life, a transition that is presenting our frontier-loving country with the most recent of its great challenges. This renascence has been developing with such rapidity that its full implications have been missed even by many of its participants, but it is a change which in its vast and permanent significance to the nation ought soon to become a familiar theme to all of us.

If the changing South is not the land of the myth, what then is it, and where is it headed?

The single unifying physical element of the American South is a rather uniform climate with abundant rains (see Figure 1), and long, warm growing seasons. Landforms, minerals, and plant life vary greatly, and so do soils, which, unfortunately, average out as scarcely mediocre in fertility.

The cement that binds together these diversities is the inheritance of a unique cultural pattern and a shattering material bankruptcy from a brief heyday of plantation glory. The process of trial and error by which other American regions found their vocations a century or more ago is being re-enacted before our eyes, but more quickly and deftly. The South is profiting from its own and its neighbors' blunders and has begun to "substitute the research laboratory for the wailing wall." It is learning to capitalize on its great human resources, its considerable mineral, plant, and hydrologic treasure, and, particularly, to adapt itself profitably to a near-tropical climate favoring farming, forestry, recreation, and even industry.

Perhaps the simplest keys to these bewildering events are the recent trends in the two basic geographical elements of the region: its people and its land. In April, 1950, the South* reported a population of some 41½ million, or 28% of the nation's total. During the past half century the South has merely kept pace with the rest of the country in population growth, but in the make-up and activities of its people

* Throughout this discussion this term refers to the following thirteen states: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas. This is an arbitrary choice adopted in order to expedite the use of statistics; the author is keenly aware that portions of the above states are culturally non-Southern and that sections of others not listed should be included in the South.

there have been notable changes. From 1940 to 1950 its urban population increased by 35%, the fastest rate of growth in the United States. The flight from the land has so intensified in recent years that in the 1940's about half of all Southern counties—almost all rural ones—lost population, and the South was the only section of the country to show an absolute decline in rural-farm dwellers.

Another significant change is the steadily decreasing proportion of Negroes in the South. In 1860, 38 % of the people were Negroes, in 1950 only 22 %, and there is every indication of a continuing drop, notwithstanding the fact that the national percentage of Negroes has remained stable.

In the past a low standard of living and inadequate medical facilities kept health levels markedly below those in the rest of the country; they have now improved sufficiently to bring life expectancy approximately up to the national figure. The population, however, is still a relatively young one, and the South continues to function in a very real sense as the seedbed of the nation—its most fertile area and largest source of out-migrants. The great exodus to the North and West (amounting to several million people), which began seriously in the 1920's, reached full flood in the past decade, with Negroes participating in very large numbers.

By virtue of much self-sacrifice the South has made advances in the quality and quantity of its educational resources that have begun to pay dividends of economic and social achievement. A sizable North-South educational differential persists, even though the South increased its school expenditures 155 times in the period 1870 to 1948, and now spends more of its income on education than the country as a whole; but the gap may yet be closed if Southern incomes continue to increase and the regional birth rate continues to drop.

As the accompanying graph on Figure 2 indicates, there has been a sharp rise in the income levels of Southerners in the past two decades. A certain fraction of this rise can be attributed to wartime industry and federal aid in various forms, but in large part it reflects the general strengthening of the economy. Historically, the South has functioned as the exporter of a few staple crops and raw materials and as a market for all the industrial and farm products it has been unable or unwilling to furnish itself. This unbalanced, speculative, quasi-colonial economy is now being replaced with diversified agriculture and industry, as is shown clearly by both the accompanying maps. The South is now supplying to itself, and even exporting, a wide variety of products in its new role as a full partner in the national economy.

Some interesting clues to the economic changes can be found in the ways in which Southern workers are employed. Although farm income has greatly increased in the past two decades, the lower proportion of workers engaged in agriculture (32% in 1940, and only 21% in 1950) indicates a distinct decline in the historic dominance of farming. Mining, the other major extractive industry, has remained stationary in terms of employment, occupying during the same period only about 3% of the regional working force.

On the other hand, the proportion of employment and income derived from the various manufacturing, service, and secondary industries has risen steadily in recent years. It is not unlikely that industrial activity (occupying more than 18% of the region's workers by 1950) may surpass agriculture during the current decade as the prime producer of wealth.

The remarkable advance of manufacturing in the Southeastern States is not merely a matter of expanding volume in the few old established industries—textiles, wood products, and tobacco—but, more significantly, a vigorous branching out into chemicals, hydroelectric energy and refined mineral fuels, transport equipment, electrical goods, metal products, and other technically advanced enterprises. Simultaneously, the older industries have upgraded their products, introduced more complex forms of manufacture, and, as in the case of the Southern entry into synthetic textiles, have explored new fields of endeavor. Because of a slow start and the limitations imposed by the mineral and transport situation, there is little likelihood that the South will ever produce a Ruhr or a Pittsburgh, but the general diversification of economic activity which it seems destined to achieve may prove healthier than either its own overly agrarian past or the top-heavy industrialization of a Black Country.

The bulk of this industrial expansion has come not only through the development of war industries such as the $600,000,000 H-bomb project near Aiken, S.C., but through the establishment of branch plants of Northern businesses, and by the investment of outside capital in new enterprises within the South. To name but a few of the most recent: the Ford and

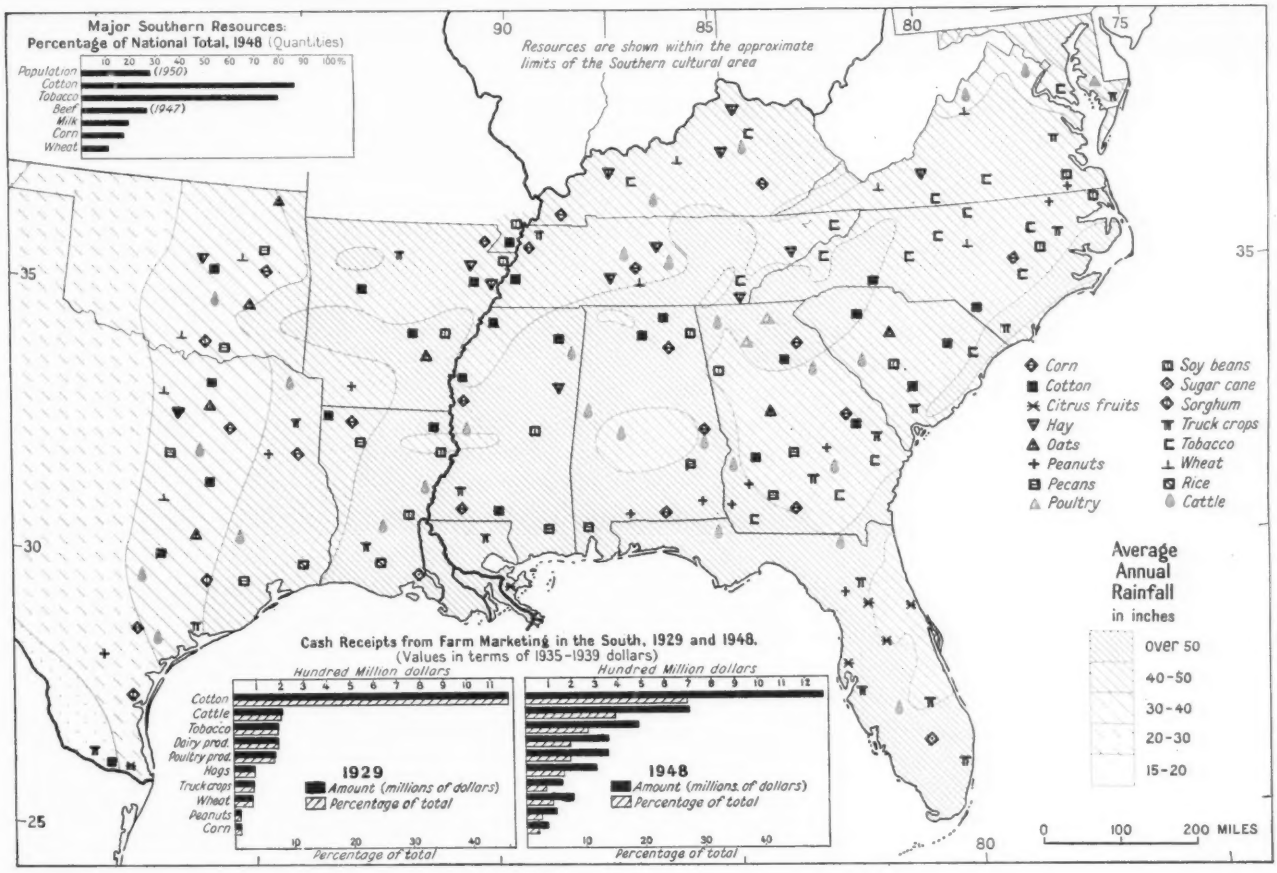

Fig. 1—Agricultural Resources and Rainfall

General Motors plants in Atlanta, Ga.; the Camden, S.C., plant of the du Pont company, producing the new fiber, orlon; the Celanese Corporation's acetate filament yarn plant near Rock Hill, S.C.; and the International Paper Company's rayon pulp plant near Natchez, Miss. The largest weaver of rayon, Burlington Mills, now has more than thirty plants in operation, and has recently announced plans for a new mill near Sanford, N.C. Other spectacular developments include the chemical and ore processing plants along the Gulf Coast.

The well-advertised hydroelectric power development in and around the Southern Appalachians has been the critical locational factor for surprisingly few new businesses. The majority of the new factories were drawn to the South by the opportunity of profitably supplying markets furnished by a steadily increasing population with expanding purchasing power. Some other new industries are oriented toward supplies of raw materials that are abundantly or uniquely present in the South such as petroleum, natural gas, coal, iron, phosphates, bauxite, and sulphur; others were attracted primarily by the industrial labor supply, especially by its abundance, reliability, and quality. It would seem, then, that the recent industrial boom in the South is based on conditions permanently attractive to the investor, not on a relatively evanescent wage difference, and that it is likely to continue for a good many decades. The fact that some 35% of the industrial structures contracted for in the United States between 1945 and 1948 were to be erected in the South gives some indication of the sustained strength of this movement.

The tragedy and the promise of the South are clearly marked also on the face of its land. The campaign to arrest the destruction of soil resources and to conserve and rebuild what is left continues vigorously. Now that the countryside is being renovated through contour plowing, strip cropping, and the use of cover crops designed to protect and enrich the soil, and with 56% of the nation's fertilizer bill being paid by the South, the destruction of the soil has been retarded

sufficiently to minimize one of the main causes of agricultural crisis.

As the number of farms in the South has decreased, their average size has grown, permitting more intelligent and efficient management of the land. This crucial reversal of the fragmentation of holdings that had been going on since the Civil War became evident in the early 1930's with the decline in farm tenancy. From a total of 1-3/4 million units operated by tenants in 1929, the number of such farms had dropped to a little over 1 million in 1944, and is probably much lower at the present time. In the face of a great loss of labor and a dearth of farm mechanization, the South can boast of the greatest relative gains in the United States (1933–1950) in the productivity of the farm worker and the per acre value of farm land.

The remarkable increase in Southern farm income from 1929 to 1948 (see graph on Figure 1) was in part a matter of governmental subsidies and rising commodity prices. In the main, however, it was due to the substantial gains in per acre yields of crops and livestock through better plant and animal selection, improved farm practices, and, notably, a shift in the selection of crops. The gospel of diversification has been preached with mounting success. The acreages devoted to cotton, corn, and tobacco—the old stand-bys—have been curtailed; more attention is being given to peanuts, soybeans, the small grains, truck crops, citrus fruits and other tree crops, and a great variety of hay and forage crops.

But the most noteworthy trend in Southern land use today is the rapid transition to a pasture and livestock—principally beef cattle—economy. A grass-and-cattle rush has resulted from the recognition of the cheapness of potentially good pasture, the unsatisfied local demand for meat products, the possibilities inherent in new breeds of forage plants and livestock, the soil building aspects of animal husbandry, and the profit to be derived from year-round grazing with a

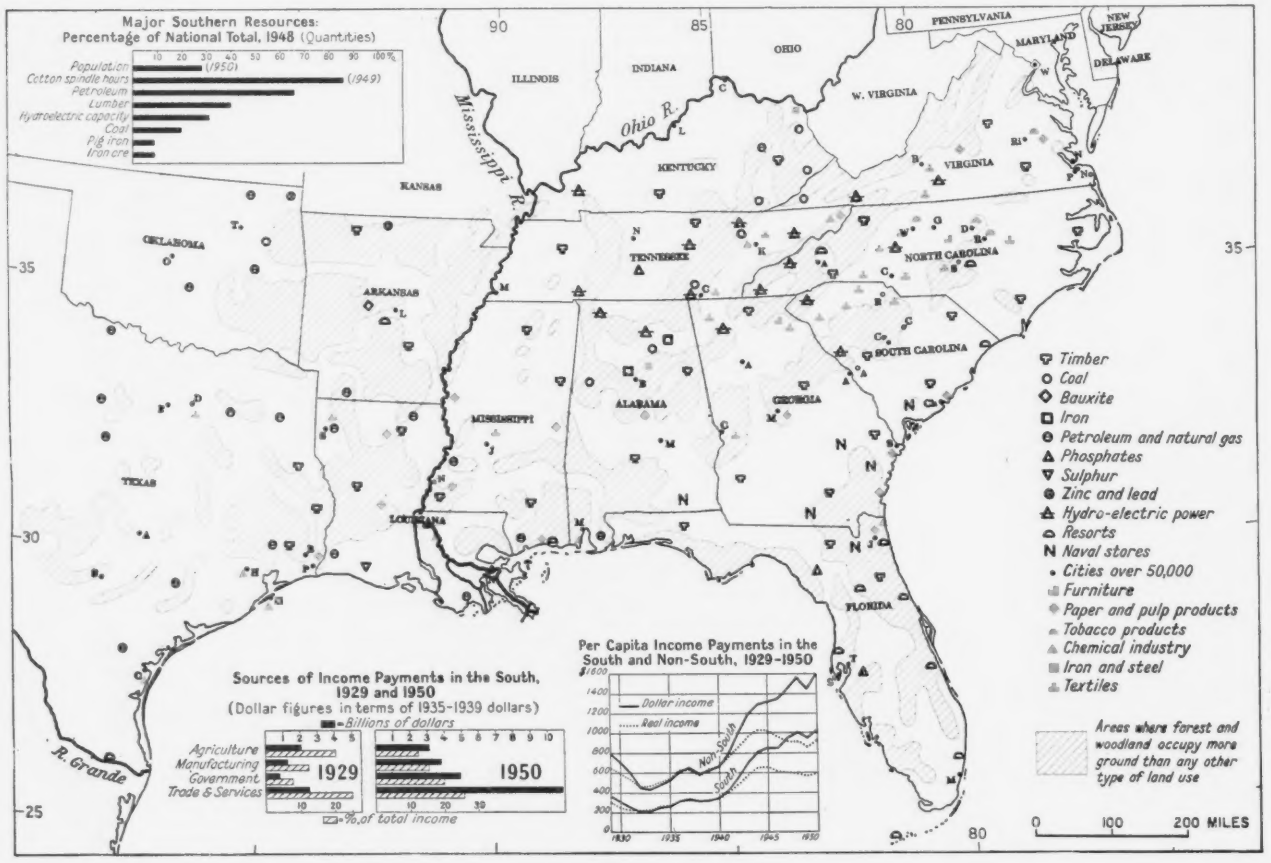

Fig. 2—Mineral, Forest, and Industrial Resources

concomitant decrease in overhead costs. The broiler industry also has made spectacular progress in parts of the South, and although egg and dairy production is only getting started, the livestock industries of the South all seem destined for prosperity.

No activity is more important to the region than growing the trees that occupy some 55% of its territory (Figure 2). With less than one-third of the nation's forests, the South produces half of our annual timber growth (and also maintains a virtual world monopoly of turpentine and rosin). The progressive exhaustion of most of our non-Southern forests has combined with our mounting demand for wood products to give this Southern resource a particular value. Although there has been a steady drop in the amount of standing timber and a deterioration in the quality of the remnant because of reckless, haphazard cutting, of late the formulators of Southern forest policy have tried to equalize forest growth and drain, and to institute scientific tree farming. There can be no doubt that the South could double its present production by fully stocking with useful trees its great acreages of brush and abandoned land, by improved management, and by more effective fire and disease control. It could thus support its ever-expanding wood products industries and continue to export lumber to other areas. Whether this increase in output can be attained is still unclear, largely because of the presence of innumerable small farm forest holdings; but many observers are hopeful, and the progress made on large private landholdings may be symptomatic of future possibilities.

All in all, whether we mourn the passing of the frontier and plantation folkways or rejoice in the improved welfare of the South, it appears that the Southern people are approaching the national norms. The various North-South differentials are being chipped away, unevenly to be sure, but unmistakably. The South has too long been a paradoxical land of poverty in the midst of potential plenty. Even though its inhabitants have not yet fully utilized themselves and the resources of their physical environment, the forces of a profound change are at last in visible motion everywhere, and it will not be many years before we shall have to stop calling the South poor. Mines, farms, forests, and dams can feed numerous mills scattered over the countryside and in the expanding cities; and both farming and industry are becoming varied, balanced, and profitable as they never have been before. Within this century the South is ceasing to be a national problem and is attaining its long deferred status of economic and social equality in the richest nation in the world. The process is not easy, but the wheels have begun to turn.

WILBUR ZELINSKY

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focus is published monthly (except July and August) by the American Geographical Society to provide background facts and geographical interpretations of specific problems and significant events in today's news. Subscription: $1 for 10 issues. From time to time bonus maps will be issued as supplements to *FOCUS*. The first of these is the Society's Map of the World (equatorial scale 1:30,000,000) which will be sent free to *FOCUS* subscribers.

The American Geographical Society, a non-profit institution, was founded in 1852. Its purpose is to collect and disseminate geographical knowledge, and encourage geographical research and exploration. Membership is of seven types: Fellows (annual dues $10); Sustaining Fellows (annual dues $25); Contributing Fellows (annual dues $100); Life Fellows (contribution $250); Patrons (contribution $1,000); Patrons in Perpetuity (contribution $5,000); Benefactors (contribution $50,000). President: Richard U. Light; Director: George H. T. Kimble; Executive Secretary: Charles B. Hitchcock.

Forthcoming issues of *FOCUS* will deal with the Outlook for Wood; Pakistan; and Libya. Previous numbers dealt with Korea, U. S. S. R. Oil, the Ruhr, Water in the United States, Viet Nam, Yugoslavia, Outlook for Steel, Strategic Iran, Poliomyelitis in the United States, and Israel.

AMERICAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY NEWS

Centennial Dinner

The American Geographical Society is celebrating its 100th anniversary on November 8 at a Centennial Dinner in the Starlight Room of the Hotel Waldorf-Astoria in New York City. Lowell Thomas will preside as toastmaster over this gathering of distinguished guests.

Invitations to the dinner will be sent to all Fellows; other Focus subscribers and their guests are also welcome. Mail reservations ($7.50 per plate) are invited.

Centennial Committees

More than fifty women of prominence in geography and related fields have formed a Women's Centennial Committee under the chairmanship of Mrs. Mary Vander Pyl, who is associated with Dr. William Beebe in zoological research. The committee will hold a tea meeting at the AGS Exhibit Room on Thursday, October 25th, at 3:30 p.m., to adopt a program for the coming year.

Now in process of formation is a Men's Centennial Committee, under the leadership of Woodfin L. Butte of the Standard Oil Company (New Jersey) and member of the AGS Council.

Glacier Research

Now returned after three and a half months of meteorological and glaciological observations are the fifteen men who took part in the third season of the Society's Juneau Ice Field Research Project, under contract with the Office of Naval Research. With headquarters set up on a rocky crag jutting above Taku glacier, 25 miles northeast of Juneau, the men spent the summer investigating rate of movement, depth of annual snow fall, melting intensity, and collecting other scientific data. The Air Force, the Army and the U.S. Forest Service cooperated in the project. Logistic highlight of the season: successful parachuting of two 5000-lb. Snow Weasels from an Air Force "Flying Boxcar."

Medical Geography

Maps have long been used to make life safer for man. Earthquake belts and hurricane paths have been charted, and along them special building precautions are taken. Now the AGS is applying cartographic techniques to yet another potential killer—epidemics.

An *Atlas of Diseases,* now in progress, is the AGS contribution to the new and highly promising research field of medical geography. Plate 3, "Distribution of Malaria Vectors," appeared in the October issue of the *Geographical Review;* plate 4, "Distribution of Helmanthieses (intestinal parasites, hookworms, filarie and others)," is scheduled for publication in January, 1952. Previous plates have mapped poliomyelitis and cholera distribution. The Society's work in medical geography is attracting widespread attention among doctors, pharmaceutical companies, insurance companies and health officials throughout the world. (Price of individual maps: $1.25 folded, $1.50 flat).

For Metropolitan Hikers

A completely revised edition of the "New York Walk Book," by Raymond H. Torrey, Frank Place, Jr., and Robert L. Dickinson has been issued by the AGS in time for fall hikers to make use of this guidebook to the trails and paths in the New York area. Revised under the sponsorship of the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, the "Walk Book" offers as special features, up to date topographic trail maps in color, and pen and ink sketch illustrations ($3.50).

Lecture Series: The Arab World

Speaking under the joint auspices of the AGS and New York University, two authorities on the Near East will this month discuss "Arab Countries Today," as part of the annual Regular Lecture Series offered for Fellows of the Society and their guests. Byron MacDonald, authority on the Lebanon and Syria area, will appear on October 17, to be followed on October 31 by Wendell Phillips, president of the American Foundation for the Study of Man. Both talks will be given at the NYU School of Education Auditorium, 35 West 4th Street, New York, beginning at 8 p.m.

As in previous years, the Society's lectures during the coming season will be offered in two series: Regular lectures of general interest and Special lectures of primarily professional interest. Reminder notices of each lecture will be sent to all Fellows in the New York Metropolitan area and to those living elsewhere who request to be on the mailing list. FOCUS will carry announcements of all lectures.

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ALICE TAYLOR, EDITOR

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Outlook for Wood

Wood is the world's most widely used industrial raw material, its third most important fuel, the source of nearly all its paper and of most of its packaging materials. But wood is more: it is the raw material for a great range of chemically synthesized products, from radio recording tape to inner soles for shoes, from photographic papers to bituminized sewer pipes.

It has, indeed, been stated that if the Nazis had been successful, as they almost were, in obtaining control of adequate wood supplies, Germany would have been well-nigh blockade-proof. But important as wood has been in war, and may, alas, again be, its greatest role is still to be played in the multiple enrichment of human life in peace. Throughout the world the quantity of industrial wood and wood products used per person is one of the major indexes of economic development; by doubling the amount of wood used in the poorer countries, their living standards could be raised astonishingly.

At first sight such a statement may seem exaggerated, for when we think of industrial development, we usually think first of iron, coal, and the lighter alloys. Only at second thought are we likely to remember such universally distributed products as photographic film, rayon, and other wood-based synthetics, or the huge quantities of carton and paper packaging needed in our daily life, or the giant tonnage of pulp required to produce newspapers and periodicals.

In measuring the world-wide utilization of timber, we have to rely on well informed guesses, for accurate reports are available from but half of the wood-producing regions. In 1949 the world's total production of roundwood was estimated at 1,397 million cubic meters,* weighing about one billion metric tons. More wood was used, by weight, than any other raw material except coal.

More than two-thirds of this output never reached a sawmill or pulpmill. About 57% was burned as fuel, and some 12% became miscellaneous products other than lumber or pulp—hewn wood for pit props and railroad ties, wood for distillation into alcohol, for the extraction of tanning agents, and for many other specialized uses.

Of the remaining 31% of the 1949 cut, about three-fourths was converted by sawmills into lumber, veneer, and plywood, destined to become everything from lettuce crates to the seamless sheaths of airplane wings; and the rest was made into pulp for paper, paperboard, and synthetics.

But, as may be seen in the accompanying table, continents and countries differ widely in their uses of wood. In South America, Africa, Asia, and parts of Europe and the U.S.S.R., fuelwood bulks many times larger than construction and industrial timber; in North America the balance is tipped the other way.

* 1 cubic meter equals 35.3 cubic feet.